

Legal Notice to Receive Comments Big Piney Recreation Realignment Project

The Big Piney Ranger District of the Ozark-St. Francis National Forests is proposing to change the management strategies of the Haw Creek Campground, Bayou Bluff Campground and the Alum Cove Recreation Area. This project is proposed to meet the periodic and short duration stays of most recreational users, reduce cost and maintenance, and maintain the character of these areas. The goal is to reduce the number of under-utilized developed recreation areas on the National Forests while providing quality and sustainable developed recreation opportunities with a focus on sites with moderate to high use.

The project area for the Recreation Realignment Project are the established boundaries of these three developed recreational areas. Haw Creek Campground is located along Arkansas Highway 123 approximately one mile west of the Fort Douglas Big Piney Bridge; Bayou Bluff Campground is along Arkansas Highway 27 approximately seven miles north of Hector, Arkansas; and Alum Cove Recreation Area is located three miles north of Deer, Arkansas.

Due to the nature of this proposal I have elected to provide a draft Environmental Assessment (EA) at the initiation of this project. In doing so the scoping and 30 day EA comment periods will run concurrently. The process to view and/or comment are outlined as follows.

The Recreation Realignment Project Draft EA on the Big Piney Ranger District of the Ozark-St. Francis National Forests is available for your review and comments. The EA and project area map can be found online at: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/osfnf/landmanagement/planning/?cid=stelprdb5212180> or by contacting the District Office in Jasper (870) 446-5122. The proposed project is an activity implementing a land management plan and is subject to pre-decisional objection process at 36 CFR 218 Subparts A and B.

The Proposed Action and a No Action (Alternative I) were analyzed in the EA. The Proposed Action has been identified as the preferred action.

The following activities are proposed for this project:

Haw Creek Campground would convert to a point of interest (no fee area, open year round) resulting in removing amenities such as picnic tables, fire rings, lantern posts and trash cans over time as they become unusable or unsafe.

Bayou Bluff campground has camp sites on two different levels and access roads. The district is proposing closure of the upper level with decommissioning of all amenities. The lower level would be managed as a point of interest retaining use of the vault toilet, large pavilion, three shelters, and a small pavilion until they are unusable or unsafe.

The district is proposing to convert Alum Cove Recreation Area to a trail head resulting in removal of a portion of the day use area amenities such as trash cans and grills. Amenities that would remain open with limited maintenance until they are unusable or unsafe would be: a pavilion, parking area, Trail with benches, and vault toilet.

These areas would allow dispersed day use such as picnicking and overnight camping at the previous campgrounds. Trash would be managed by the user as a "pack it in, pack it out" area. No fees would be associated with these sites. The goal at each site would include developing partnerships and volunteers to assume maintenance responsibility of remaining amenities. The specific proposed activities for this project may be viewed in Chapter II of the EA.

Although a preferred action has been identified, the final decision on which action to implement has not been made. You can help in making this decision by providing comments on the EA. The opportunity to comment ends 30 days following the date of publication of the legal notice in Russellville's The Courier (§218.25 (a)(i)). Only those who submit timely and specific written comments §218.2 regarding the proposed project or activity during a public comment period established by the responsible official are eligible to file an objection §218.24(b)(6). For issues to be raised in objections, they must be based on previously submitted specific written comments regarding the proposed project or activity and attributed to the objector §218.25(3)(iii). The publication date of the legal notice in the newspaper of record is the exclusive means for calculating the time to submit written comments on a proposed project or activity §218.25(2). The time period for the opportunity to comment on a proposed project or activity to be documented with an environmental assessment shall not be extended §218.25(a)(iv).

It is the responsibility of all individuals and organizations to ensure that their comments are received in a timely manner §218.25(a)(iii).

Please submit your written comment(s) to Timothy E. Jones, Big Piney Ranger District, 12,000 SR 27 Hector, AR 72843. Verbal or hand-delivered written comments must be received during our normal business hours of 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., Mon-Fri. Electronic comments must be submitted in a format such as an email message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), or Word (.doc, .docx) to: comments-southern-ozark-stfrancis-bayou@fs.fed.us.

This project decision could be objected if public comments are received (36 CFR 218). For objection eligibility, each individual or representative from each entity submitting timely and specific written comments regarding the proposed project or activity must either sign the comments or verify identity upon request §218.24(b)(8). Please state "Recreation Realignment Project" in the subject line when providing electronic comments, or on the envelope when replying by mail.

Because the Draft EA is being reviewed both internally and externally during this 30 - day period, it can be expected that the Final EA could have minor changes which will not affect the analysis or the results of the assessment, but serve to clarify and enhance the disclosure of effects.

Additional information may be obtained by contacting Mike Mulford at the District Ranger's Office in Jasper, Arkansas at 870-446-5122 extension 5136.

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